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THE MUSICAL TIMES,
And Singing Class Circular.
MAY 15th, 1855.

HISTORY OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.

Compiled from "Sir John Hawkins's History of Music."

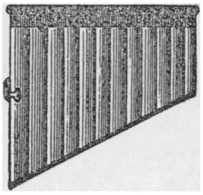
By James Tilleard, F.R.G.S.

From the "Educational Expositor."

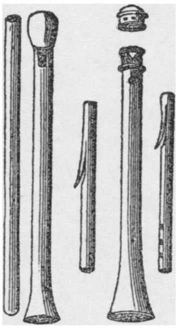
(Continued from page 353, Vol. VI.)

Book II. Wind Instruments.

In Prop. I. of this book, Mersennus describes an instrument resembling the Syringa of Pan, formed of reeds in different length conjoined with wax. The instrument exhibited is of this form, and it consists of twelve tubes of tin, the lesser being subtriple in its ratio to the greater. This instrument, he says, was used by the braziers or tinkers of Paris, who go about the streets to mend kettles, and advertise the people of their approach by the sound of it.



He next speaks of the lesser Tibiæ, and those of few holes, here delineated, which he thus describes: 'The first of these instruments, viz., that on the left hand, is perforated both above and below, and is made of the rind or bark of a tree, or of a branch of the elder-tree, having the pith taken out; or of the wood of the box-tree excavated, or even of iron or any other matter. The second has three apertures, that is to say, one at the top, where the breath is blown into it, another in front, below it, where the sound is made, and a third at the bottom, where the wind goes out. The third and fifth figures represent pipes of reed or wheat-straw, on which the shepherds play, wherefore the instrument is called "tenuis avena," "calamus agrestis," and "stipula."

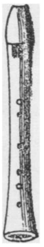


'There now remains the fourth pipe, which is commonly called the Eunuch. This sings rather by speaking than by blowing, for it returns a sound or voice of the same acumen with which it is prolated, and which is reflected with a bombus or humming sound like a drone, from a very thin or fine sheep-skin or onion-peel, and acquires a new grace. This slender skin covers the orifice at the upper extremity, and, like the head of a drum, is stretched or strained on the pipe, and tied round with a thread, and the cap or cover, which is represented over it, and which has several holes in it, is put over it, but the sound comes freely out of the hole at the bottom. There are some persons who recite songs of four or more parts with these pipes. We must not omit that pipes of this kind may be made of the bones of mules or other animals well cleansed, or of those of birds, nay even of the middle stalk of an onion, of glass, wax, &c., and of these materials some have constructed organ-pipes.'

Prop. II. contains a description of the small flute, or pipe, with three holes, with which the tabor or little drum is used in accompaniment. Its form is here delineated :—

Upon this instrument Mersennus makes some curious observations, as that though it has but three holes, eighteen sounds may be produced from it. He says that the gravest sound is prolated when all the holes are stopped, and that the three next in succession are made by lifting up the fingers, so that the fourth note is the sound of the instrument when open. The other sounds, and which make up the number eighteen, he says, are produced by stronger blasts of the breath, accommodated to the different degrees of acuteness required; and this variety of blowing is also observed in the other tibiæ and fistulæ, of which he afterwards speaks. Mersennus says he had heard an Englishman, John Price by name, by the sole variety of blowing on this instrument, ascend to the compass of a terdiapason or twenty-second. He adds, that there are some things concerning this pipe which are wonderful. First, that after the graver sounds, g, a, b, c, which are produced by the least blast, the blowing a little stronger gives the fifth above: and yet it is impossible to produce from this instrument the three intermediate sounds which occur between the fourth note c, and the fifth gg, viz., d, e, f, that so the first octave might be perfect, as is the second; and this defect, he says, is peculiar to this instrument only. Secondly that it leaps from its gravest sound to a diapason when the wind is a little increased, and again to a second diapason if the wind be increased to a greater degree.

From the pipe with three holes, the associate of the tabor, Mersennus proceeds to what he calls the lesser tibia or Flajolet, here delineated :—



Of this instrument Mersennus observes that it need not exceed the length of the little finger. He says, that at the aperture near the top the impelled wind goes out, while the rest passes through the open holes and the lower orifice. He observes that the white circles marked on the instrument resembling a cypher, denote the holes on the back part of it, and that the uppermost of these is stopped by the thumb of the left hand, and the lowermost or fifth from the top, by the thumb of the right hand; the black circles represent the holes in the front of the instrument. He adds, that in his time one Le Vacher was a celebrated performer on this instrument, and in his French work he intimates that he was also a maker of flajolets.

In the Harm. Univer. Des Instrumens à Vent, Prop. VII., Mersennus speaks more fully of the flajolet. He says that there are two ways of sounding this instrument, and all such as have the aperture under the tampion; the first is by simple blowing, the other by articulation and the action of the tongue; the former, he says, imitates the organ, the latter the voice; one is practised by villagers and apprentices, the other by masters.

The ambit of the flajolet, according to the scale exhibited by Mersennus, is two octaves from g, SOL, RE, DO, upwards. At the end of his description of the instrument, both in the Latin and French work, he gives a Vaudeville for flajolets, in four parts, by Henry le Jeune, who, he says, composed the examples for the other wind instruments described in his book, as knowing very well their power and extent.

Prop. V. treats of the Fistula Dulcis, seu Anglica, called also the flute à bec; the figure of it is here represented :—

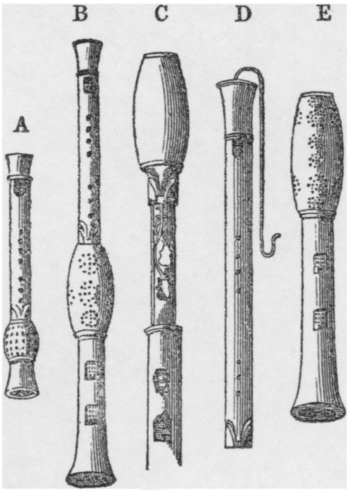
Of the two figures adjacent to the instrument at length, the uppermost shows the aperture for the passage of the wind between the tampion or plug and the beak; the other represents the end of the flute, with a view of the beak and the tampion. This instrument has eight holes in the front, and one behind, which is stopped by the thumb; as to the lower or eighth hole, Mersennus remarks that there are two so numbered; for this reason, that the instrument may be played on either by right or left-handed persons, one or other of the two holes being stopped with wax.

Mersennus observes that flutes are so adjusted by their different sizes as to form a concentus of treble, contratenor, tenor, and bass; and the treble flute is more acute than the contratenor by a ninth or a diapason, and a tone. The contratenor he makes to be a diapente more acute than the bass, as is also the tenor; for he supposes the contratenor and tenor to be tuned in unison, in the same manner as they are in several other harmonies of instruments.

In this, which is his Latin work, Mersennus does not mention the sizes of the several flutes, but in the Harmonie Universelle he is more particular, for he says that the length of the bass flute is two feet and three quarters, that of the tenor one foot five inches, and the treble only eleven lines.

From the scale or diagram for the flute exhibited by Mersennus, it appears that the ambit or compass of the instrument is a disdiapason, or fifteen notes, and that the lowest note of the system for the treble flute is C, FA, DO; but this system, as also those of the tenor and bass flute, is adapted to what is called by him and other French writers, the Petit Jeu; nevertheless, there is a flute known by the name of the concert flute, the lowest note whereof is F.

Mersennus next proceeds to what he calls Fistulas regis, royal flutes, or those of the Grand Jue, as he calls it; meaning thereby, as it is supposed, those that are tuned in unison with their respective notes in the Scala Maxima, the forms whereof are thus represented by him :—



The instruments here delineated are thus described by the author: The flute A has a key, which by the pressure of the little finger opens the hole which is under it in the box. The fistula B has three boxes, a greater and two lesser; the first of these is represented apart by C, that all the springs which are any way necessary to open and shut the holes may appear; below that part of the instrument, resembling in its form a barrel, are two keys which command two holes below them, and being pressed with the little finger, open either the one or the other of them. Beneath these are seen springs contained in the two lower boxes of the instrument B, but as they are too far distant from the hands, the little square pieces of brass which appear in the lower part of fig. C, are pressed down by the foot, in order to lift up the springs, as is seen in the tail of the lower spring, which being pushed down, lifts up the plate, and opens a great hole like a window, and nearly equal to the breadth of the fistula.

The figures D and E represent a flute of the larger size in two separate pieces, the springs being concealed by the perforated box, which in fig. C, for the purpose of exhibiting the springs, must be supposed to be slipped up above the forked keys, the station whereof is above the box, as is seen in fig. B. The little tube with a curvature at each end, is inserted into the top of the instrument, and hooks into a hole of a piece of wood, which appears opposite the second hole in fig. B, that the mouth of the flute, which cannot be reached by the mouth of the performer, may be, as it were, transferred to the end of the tube opposite the second hole, fig. D. This contrivance is necessary only in flutes of the larger size, the bass especially, which are from seven to eight feet long.

After exhibiting a gavot of four parts as an example of a concentus for English flutes, Mersennus remarks that a performer on this instrument, at the same time that he plays an air, may sing a bass to it; but without any articulation of the voice, for that the wind which proceeds from the mouth while singing is sufficient to give sound to the flute, and so a single person may perform a duo on this instrument.

Prop. VI. treats of the German flute, and also of the Helvetian flute or fife, each whereof is represented as having only seven holes, including that aperture which is blown into, from which it should seem that the eighth hole, or that which is now opened by means of a key, is a late improvement of this instrument.

Mersennus gives this figure as an example of a treble instrument, which he says ought to be one foot ten inches long, measuring from the bottom of the tampion, signified by the dotted circle, to the lower extremity: those for the other parts, he observes, should be longer and also thicker. For example, he says, that to produce the most grateful sounds of a concentus, or, as he otherwise expresses it in the French edition, to make the octave or fifteenth, the flute should be twice or four times as long and as thick as the treble flute. He adds that flutes of this kind are made of such woods as are easily excavated, and will best polish, as namely, plum-tree, cherry-tree, and box: and that they may be made of ebony, crystal, and glass, and even of wax.

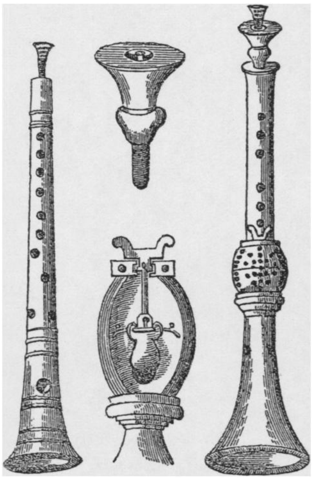
The system of this instrument is of a large extent, comprehending a disdiapason and diapente, or nineteen sounds; Mersennus has given two scales, the one commencing from G, and the other from D, a fifth higher. The first of these scales, it seems, was adjusted by one Quiclet, Lat. Kicletus, a French cornetist, and the other by Le Vacher, already mentioned; the method of stopping is apparently different in these two scales in many instances, that is to say, the same sound that is produced by the opening and shutting of certain holes in the diagram of Quiclet, is produced by the opening and shutting of others in that of Le Vacher; and it is to be remarked, that in the latter, no one sound of the instrument is directed to be produced by unstopping all the holes, from whence it appears that the present practice has its foundation in the example of Quiclet.

It is worthy of remark that neither of these persons had discovered that the diapason of any of the sounds in the first septenary was to be produced by a stronger blast of the breath; as is observed in the English flute, and at this day in the German flute; for to produce the notes in the second septenary, and so upwards, a different method of stopping is required than for their octaves below.

In this proposition Mersennus treats also of the Tibia Helvetica, or fife; this is in truth an instrument precisely of the same species with the former, but proportionably less in every respect; wherefore, says the author, 'it sounds more acutely and vehemently, 'which it ought to do, lest the sound of it should be 'drowned by that of the drum.'

Speaking of the concentus for German flutes, Mersennus says that it can consist of only three parts, for that in a bass German flute the distance of the holes would be so great that no finger could command them, for which reason he says that in a concentus of four parts, the bass is either the sacbut or bassoon.

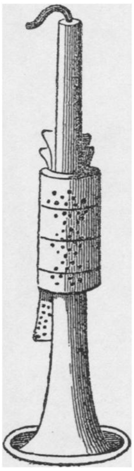
Propositions VII. and VIII. comprehend a description and explanation of the Hautboy, a treble instrument invented by the French, and of the instruments used in concentus with it, namely, the Bassoon, Bombardt, Fagot, Courtaut, and Cervelat.



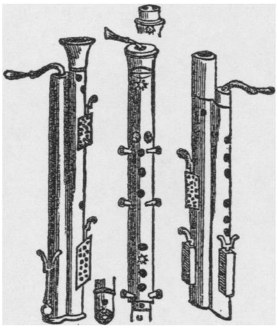
The hautboy described by Mersennus is by him given in two forms, viz., the treble and tenor; the first is the least, and has ten holes, the latter only seven, the lowest whereof is opened by a key.

In his description Mersennus notes a diversity between the holes for the fingers and those for the egress of the wind, therefore of the ten holes in the treble hautboy, nine only are to be reckoned harmonical; and of the eight in the tenor, which number includes that concealed under the box, and that on either side below it, the last serve only for the emission of the wind, so that the number of harmonical holes is seven. Of the intermediate figures the upper shows the mouth-piece of the tenor called the Pirovette, in which the reed is inserted in a larger size, the under one is the box open and with the key exposed.

He gives also a representation of the bass hautboy of the form in the margin. This instrument, Mersennus says, was in length five feet, and being so long, is inspired by means of the tube at the top of it, in which a small tongue or reed is inserted for the same purpose as in the treble and tenor hautboy. The number of holes contained in it are eleven; of these seven are seen in the upper part of the instrument, three are contained under the box, and another is placed below it, in a situation to be commanded by that key which appears below the box on the left hand; the three holes within the box are stopped and opened by three of the keys that are seen above the box, and that below by the fourth, which communicates with that below. The box is perforated in many places, to give egress to the sound.



Prop. VIII. treats of such pipes as are compacted together in a little bundle, for which reason they are called Fagots, and of Bassoons, &c., and exhibits an instrument of this kind in two forms, as also another called by the French the Courtaut. They are severally represented by the following figures:—

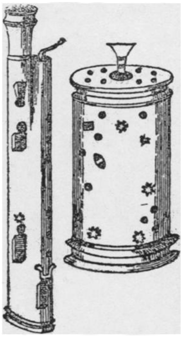


These figures are described by Mersennus in the order of their situation. The first has three keys, that on the left hand naked, the two on the right covered with boxes. The brazen tube has a mouth-piece at the extremity, by means whereof the instrument is inflated; the funnel at the top is moveable, and the instrument, though apparently consisting of two tubes, is in effect one, the two being bound together with hoops of brass, and the cavities of each stopped with a peg, as is seen in the under of the two short figures, in which are two white spots denoting two pegs that stop the cavities of the two tubes in such manner that the wind may not escape till it arrives at the upper hole under the funnel, except when either of the holes short of it is unstopped.

The second figure represents an instrument, called, by reason of its shortness, the Courtaut. This, Mersennus says, was made of one cylindrical piece of wood, and had eleven holes. The upper of the two short figures shows that the Courtaut has two bores, which are concealed under the moveable box into which the tube is inserted; the holes in those tampions, called by Mersennus Tetines, which project from each side of the instrument, are for the fingers, and by being doubled are adapted to the use of either right or left handed persons. The two light holes are on the opposite side of the instrument, the upper one is for the egress of the wind after all the rest are stopped. Mersennus adds that there are some persons, who by excavating a stick or walking-staff, have wrought it into an instrument of this latter kind, thereby making of it a kind of Bourdon, like those used by the pilgrims to the body of St. James at Compostella, for the purpose of recreating themselves on a walk.

For a description of the third instrument we must refer to the French edition, where it is said to be the same with the first, but without the funnel.

The Bassoon, according to Mersennus, is an instrument exceeding in magnitude all others of the Fagot kind, to which it is a bass, wherefore it is called the Bassoon; though there is another kind of bassoon which he calls the Cervelat, a word signifying a sausage; this strange instrument is inflated by means of a reed resembling that of a hautboy, but of a larger size. The instrument itself is but five inches in heighth, and yet is capable of producing a sound equally grave with one of forty inches in length. Within it are eight canals or ducts, answering to the number of holes in the lid or upper surface; these canals, it seems, have a communication with one another, and yet are affected by the stopping of those on the surface ef the cylinder; some of them corresponding to one canal and others to others, in the same manner as if all were reduced into one continued tube. The white circles denote the holes on the opposite side. The two bassoons are exhibited by Mersennus in this form :—



Prop. X. treats of the Tibia Pictavia, or Hautbois de Poictou, a very slender hautboy; and also of the Cornamusa or bagpipe, consisting of a Bourdon or drone, a small pipe in which is inserted a wheaten straw, and another pipe called the Calumeau, with seven holes. These two pipes are inserted into the neck of a calf-skin bag, resembling in shape a chemist's retort, on the back whereof is fixed the drone above mentioned, as also a short pipe, through which the whole instrument is inflated by the mouth of the performer. There is no need to insert a figure of this instrument, as it differs but very little from the Scotch bagpipe.

Mersennus adds that in France the country people make use of this instrument on holydays, and in their songs and dances at weddings; nay, that they sing their vespers to it in churches where there are no organs. In the next proposition he describes an instrument of an elegant form and richly decorated, called the Musette, the bagpipe of the French.

(To be continued.)

MUSIC
AMONG THE POETS AND POETICAL WRITERS.

By Mary Cowden Clarke.

(Continued from page 383, Vol. VI.)

Chaucer makes habitual singing—singing to themselves, for mere cheerfulness of heart, and gaiety of spirit—an attribute of his youthful heroes. The young Squire, in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, is thus described in one of the lines :—

> " Singing he was or fluting all the day."

And the gallant young Knight Arcite, going forth into the woods at sunrise, to do observance to May-morning, gathers a fresh garland of woodbine and hawthorn leaves for his head :—

> " And loud he sang again the sunny sheen."

Troilus, that prince of true lovers, sings to ease his heart, when Cressida is away :—

> " For which him liked in his songes show
>   Th' encheson[*] of his woe as he best might,
> And made a song of wordes but a few,
>   Somewhat his woful heartë for to light;
>   And when he was from every man 'is sight,
> With softë voice he of his lady dear
> That absent was, gan sing as ye may hear."

And there is an exquisite passage, describing Troilus, in fond reminiscence, noting all the spots associated to him with some especial thought of his lost mistress; among others, he remarks :—

> " And at the corner in the yonder house
>   Heard I mine alderlievest[†] lady dear
> So womanly with voice melodious
>   Singen so well, so goodly and so clear,
>   That in my soul yet me thinketh I hear
> The blissful sound; and in that yonder place
> My lady first me took into her grace."

The fine old poet, with his power of perception and description, is no less forcible when depicting a ludicrous image connected with singing, than when—as above, showing his full appreciation of the sentiment and subtle beauty belonging to it. Can anything, for instance, be more ridiculously true to the idea of a wanton old man singing jolly songs with his wrinkled throat quavering out the ineffectual strains, than these two lines?

> " The slackë skin about his neck shaketh
> While that he sang, so chanteth he and craketh."

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Shakespeare has a droll hint of the natural impulse to sing as a means of overcoming fear, as well as of hiding fear. The Athenian clown, Nick Bottom the weaver, when transformed with an ass's head, tries to bully himself into courage, and to inspire his companions with belief in it, by these words :—

" I will walk up and down here; and I will *sing*, that they shall hear I am not afraid."

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Longfellow speaks of song as a means of beguiling grief and fatigue :—

> " Late in the afternoon, when the sun was near to his setting,
> Echoing far o'er the fields came the roll of drums from the churchyard.
> Thither the women and children thronged. On a sudden the church-doors
> Opened, and forth came the guard, and marching in gloomy procession
> Followed the long imprisoned, but patient, Acadian farmers.
> Even as pilgrims, who journey afar from their homes and their country,
> Sing as they go, and in singing forget they are weary and way-worn,
> So with songs on their lips the Acadian peasants descended
> Down from the church to the shore, amid their wives and their daughters,
> Foremost the young men came; and raising together their voices,
> Sang they with tremulous lips a chaunt of the Catholic missions."

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[*] The cause.

[†] Best-beloved.